

Creating Awareness on Occupational Health and Safety among Workers Employed in Garment Industries



Home Science

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D. S. Padmini

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Resource Management, Faculty of Home Science, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

A. Venmathi

Professor and Head, Department of Resource Management, Faculty of Home Science, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Awareness of the need to implement, maintain and improve a system of occupational health and safety (OHS) management has been initiated among workers employed in garment industries located in Tirupur, India. The awareness programme consisted of two parts. In the first part, public meeting was conducted in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organization (NGO – involving experts in various fields of occupational health) twice in two consecutive years to create awareness for garment workers as well as public. In the second part, awareness programme for workers was organized in selected five garment industries by the investigator using developed course content with the help of resource persons specialized in labour laws, physiotherapy, pulmonology, nutrition, yoga and field publicity. Different mass media were used in the awareness programme. The impact of the programme was evaluated using a checklist which was administered before and after the programme. The analysis of the checklist revealed that 80 per cent of the participants gained knowledge from awareness programme. Hence, there was a significant improvement in the knowledge of the workers after the awareness programme.

Introduction

An awareness on the need to consider the employee's welfare as a factor in enhancing productivity constitutes a primary aspect of employment relations. However, in the capitalist economy the employee's welfare is often placed on the back burner in the drive for profit. This constitutes a concern to health care providers.

Clothing is the basic necessity of any human being. The textile garment industry is the largest foreign exchange earner in India. It is also the second largest employment provider next to agriculture (Vasugi, 2007). The garment industry contributes 16.63 per cent to the foreign earnings of India and it employs over 3.5 million workers. There are five different garment production hubs such as Delhi, Mumbai, Tirupur, Bangalore and Chennai in India; all specialize in different types of garment production (Singh, 2009).

Garment is one of the many labour-intensive sectors that provide a gateway for developing countries to the global market. Garment production in Tirupur located in Western Tamil Nadu, South India, accounts for approximately 80 per cent of India's total production of knitwear for export (Segar, 2009). Tirupur industrial cluster constitutes one of India's important foreign exchange earners, with a total export value of around Rs.11,000 crore in 2007. It is estimated that there are about 10,000 production units in Tirupur, employing more than 4,00,000 workers, but real numbers may well be higher than this. There are small number of large factories, employing 1,000 workers or more per unit, with smaller enterprises employing between 100 and 250 workers just below (De Neve, 2008).

In the present study, awareness on the need to implement, maintain and improve a system of occupational health and safety (OHS) management has been initiated among workers employed in garment industries.

Aim and Objectives

The main objectives of the study were to:

- create awareness on the importance of occupational health and safety and ergonomic principles in the garment industries
- help them to know the occupational health hazards of working in unergonomic workstations
- highlight them on the legal protection to labour
- educate them on work stress and its management

Methodology

The present study was taken up in Tirupur district which is the seventh largest city in Tamil Nadu, India and is one of the fastest developing city in the state. The city is popularly referred as Dollar city or small Japan or T-Shirt city or Banian city and excels in knitted ready-made garments. Garment production in Tirupur accounts for approximately 80 per cent of India's total production of knitwear for export (Regional Report, 2009). The investigator completed survey in selected 13 large, medium and small scale garment industries and found that the workers were employed in unsafe and unhealthy work environment and therefore unaware of the importance of occupational health and safety and ergonomics in the workplace. Hence an awareness programme regarding the need to apply ergonomic principles and health practices in the workplace were planned.

This part of the study consisted of two different awareness programmes

1. Public meeting

One day public meeting was conducted in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) twice in two consecutive years for garment workers as well as public. Wall posters were stuck on walls in places where people gather. Notices were distributed to the public and workers about the meeting. Invitations were printed and sent to various industries, government offices and speakers. Prior permission was got from the police to conduct the meeting. Eminent lawyer, labour officer, nutritionist, yoga master, union leaders, physiotherapist, pulmonologist and field publicity officer were invited as key speakers in the meeting. The public meetings are illustrated in Fig.1 and Fig.2.





Figure -1 : Public Meeting Conducted in year 2011



Figure -2 : Public Meeting Conducted in year 2012

2. Awareness programme for workers

The procedure for this programme is as follows:

- Selection of target group
- Development of course content
- Conduct of the programme
- Evaluation of the impact of the programme

(i) Selection of target group

According to the willingness, awareness level and cooperation of the workers, five garment industries were selected and proportionately workers were selected from each industry. The selected workers from each industry were divided into smaller groups comprising of 15 - 20 participants for the awareness programme so as to avoid difficulty in gaining knowledge by the receiving end. Altogether 300 workers were selected for awareness programme from five selected garment industries and the details are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of number of garment workers selected

Sl.No.	Garment Industries	Number of garment workers selected (N=300)
1	Sri Dhanalakshmi Exports	68
2	Sree Lakshmi Knitwear	51
3	S.K.Fashion	59
4	ISS Exports	79
5	Venkaruna Apparels	43

(ii) Development of course content

Course content was developed to create awareness among garment workers on the importance and application of occupation-

al health and safety and ergonomic principles. Table 2 presents the course content developed for the awareness programme.

Table 2. Course content

Sl. No.	Topic	Course content	Methods used
1	Good nutrition for healthy living	Basic healthy practices like hand washing Wholesome balanced diet Simple exercise	Charts, posters, lecture and group discussion
2	Occupation and health	Neural problems Problems with sense organ Gynaecological problems Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) Need for personal protective equipments	Charts, posters, pamphlets, booklets, lecture and group discussion
3	Ergonomics to improve work environment	Meaning Concept Need for ergonomics Work environment Ergonomically designed furniture	Lecture, exhibition, posters, booklets and video film show.
4	Legal protection to labour	Need for legal protection The Factory Act, 1948 The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 The Employee State Insurance Act, 1948 The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 Generic ethical code of conduct	Posters, lecture and group discussion
5	Work stress and its management	Meaning and cause Need for stress management Techniques to relieve stress through yoga and meditation	Lecture, demonstration and group discussion

(iii) Conduct of the programme

The awareness programme on occupational health and safety was conducted by the investigator systematically to the target group comprising of 15-20 workers and was repeated twice or thrice depending on the total strength of the workers employed in each industry and also number of workers willing to participate from each garment industry. The awareness programme was thus being organised during the workers' break periods or at the end of the days' work in the industries. Many audio visual aids were used to create awareness more effectively. Pamphlets and booklets were distributed among the workers for better understanding of the concept (Fig.3).



Figure -3 : Conduct of Awareness Programme

(iv) Evaluation of the impact of the programme

Impact of the awareness programme was evaluated using a checklist which consisted of statements based on course content. It was administered to the selected garment workers before conducting the awareness programme to find their knowledge on various concepts. The same checklist was readministered to the same workers after conducting the awareness programme and improvement in the knowledge level was assessed.

Results and Discussion

Altogether two hundred garment workers and public participated in the public meetings. Since the awareness programme was a general awareness so no evaluation in the improvements of knowledge gained by the participants were assessed.

The improvement in knowledge on occupational health and safety and ergonomic principles in the specific awareness programmes was assessed using a checklist and the participants' findings are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Improvements in knowledge

Sl. No.	Statements / Questions	Percentage of worker's* (N = 300)	
		Before	After
1	Are you aware of social standards being checked regularly in your company by means of social audit?	34	34
2	Are you aware of labour rights for textile workers?	33	100
3	Are you aware of the code of conduct as well as its implication?	15	100
4	Are you provided either paid sick leave or paid maternity leave?	34	34
5	Are you provided workers' compensation?	34	34
6	Does your company's management employ child labourers (children below 14 years)?	-	-
7	Do you have trade union in your company?	27	27
8	Are you a member of any trade union?	7	7
9	A person working in textile industry for a prolonged time end up in occupational health hazards.	89	100
10	Do you know the different occupational diseases and accidents in textile industry?	48	100
11	Are you aware of work-related musculoskeletal discomforts (MSDs)?	-	100
12	Do you know the parts of the body affected by MSDs?	-	100
13	Prolonged awkward postures in workplace leads to postural stress.	20	100
14	Do you know the remedy for MSDs?	-	100
15	Health and safety conditions in garment industries must be given due importance.	100	100
16	Availability of good drinking water, better illumination, temperature regulation system, fire fighting equipment, personal protective equipments, good sanitation and medical facilities are essential for a safe workplace.	100	100

17	Do you know the meaning of ergonomics?	-	100
18	Do you know ergonomically designed workstation?	-	100
19	Do you know the different personal protective equipments to be used in the textile industries and its uses?	22	100
20	Hand washing must be given due importance before eating or drinking after work.	100	100
21	Are you aware of balanced diet?	64	100
22	Do you know food pyramid?	-	100
23	Are you aware of composition of food?	1	100
24	Intake of indelicient food leads to diseases or disorders in human beings.	76	100
25	Do you know the cause of mental stress?	66	100
26	Smoking cigarette and consumption of alcohol relieves job stress.	1	-
27	Exercise, yoga and meditation play a vital role in relieving stress.	100	100
28	Do garment workers suffer from lung problems?	100	100
29	Are smoking cigarette and consuming alcohol the cause of lung problems?	78	100
Average		40	80

*** Multiple response**

The analysis of the checklist revealed that on an average 80 per cent of the participants gained knowledge from awareness programme when compared to 40 per cent before awareness programme. Hence, there was a significant improvement in the knowledge of the workers after the awareness programme. Similar studies were carried out in Taiwan (Hu et al., 1998), Poland (Milczarek and Szczecinska, 2006) and USA Pun et al., 2004). The similar studies highlighted promotion of employers' awareness of OHS in small sized industries to enhance better compliance, changes in work organisation and decrease in occupational risk.

Conclusion

The present study has ascertained lack of awareness on the importance of occupational health and safety and ergonomic principles in the garment industries among garment workers. Awareness of the OHS is one of the most important factors for sound compliance with OHS regulations. Hence an educational intervention for garment workers was designed. The workers were thus benefitted in gaining knowledge. However, it is very important that the knowledge and experience acquired by the workers who took part in the awareness programme should be disseminated among other employees of the industry.

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